

BOOKS AUTHORS & PUBLISHERS

LITERARY CRITICISM
AND BOOK NEWS

Royal Cortissov on Art as a Companion Through Life—More New Novels—Another Picture of Stage Life—New England Abroad.

A BRACING CRITIC.

ART AND COMMON SENSE. By Royal Cortissov. Art Editor of The New York Tribune. 12mo. Pp. viii, 445. Charles Scribner's Sons.

Mr. Cortissov, art editor of The Tribune, for two decades has given its readers the benefit of his wise counsel. His concern has ever been with the pure milk of the word. His point of view is familiar to those who, having intelligent ears, have heard him. Now it is a pleasant and a profitable thing to go to pass in review those salient qualities which for so long a time have made him a tonic force and a provocative figure in art criticism, and a charming writer. He has a pet phrase, and it is a very good one, which happily applies to himself as a critic. There is "nothing grand, gloomy and peculiar" about him. He speaks of great things simply. The character of the aesthete or of the pedant is not in him. He abhors nonsense. And there is nothing in the world to-day which has become so sickened over and obscured by nonsense, by most everybody concerned, as the subject of art. After his pet phrase, so excellent, Mr. Cortissov loves (ironically) perhaps best of all things in the language the name of his great bugbear, the word "esoteric." The esoteric qualities of art, he holds, mostly reside in an oracular jargon, "too often but the outward and visible sign of an inward and invisible bigotry, which would reserve the appreciation of art to a chosen few."

Then—and this, indeed, is a thing a bit peculiar to-day—he sees art steadily, and he sees it whole. His judgments have their spring in a constant interrogation of the "unimpeachable testimony" of the ages; and by his nature he is impelled to tell the result of his conscientious search after the truth with robust vigor, albeit consummate suavity. His learning he wears, not so much as M. France says, "like a flower," but as he does his hat—comfortably and as a matter of course. He has simply learned his trade, as he, and Mr. Cox, are fond of saying of the painters and craftsmen of the olden days of the giants. In no wise related to the elegants who tinker lovingly with private press monographs on Botticelli, but, most of the time, a practical, industrious journalist, whose business it is to deal with works of art, he writes a quick, flowing prose (of faultless clarity, saturated, pleasantly, with the scents and colors of literature—making no bones about it, as the precious critics do, and taking his own technique, as he holds the trained worker in any art should, in his stride. Ever and anon he deftly turns a modern phrase with a sonorous ancient ring, so that his point echoes in the caverns of the memory. And he is, to boot, abundantly amusing. By precept and example he advocates the use of humor in keeping one's head in the presence of the pontifical proceedings of the "elect." He delights to cap an ancient truth with a racy current phrase. And in bringing the subject of art down from the clouds and looking at it as a wholesome human thing, nothing is more useful than a little common speech. Mr. James hardly makes more vitalizing the witty and

sophisticated use of slang. Satire, when stirred to the use of it, Mr. Cortissov always has handy in his pocket in the shape of delightfully pat aphorism and delicious anecdote. His fruitful paths of reminiscence diverge from those of the impressionist school in that they do not all lead to cafés, but rather to the museums, to the offices of architects and the homes of great collectors. The magic of mere paint does not more sing to George Moore; but he holds to the larger idea of art. "To the beauty, woven of many threads, which is made not by technicians for their comrades, but by men for mankind." His stand is with the masters "who invented pigment and exploited it with inimitable success." For them, he calmly says, "the human interest was of profound importance." "It is a singular point that the men by whom the modern painter swears were all peculiarly human creatures, who interested themselves in familiar life, and, to be frank, put on no airs." And it is so, without "airs," that Mr. Cortissov interprets the old painters and tests the new. For, beyond all, his outstanding virtue, the thing which gives his criticism its constructive and destructive force, its illuminating interpretative value, and something very like a unique position, is that homely quality which is its salt savor and makes it free of all men, and which, doubtless, many good people are not aware has any status in art—shrewd, hard-headed common sense. He refuses to be bamboozled.

The opening essay of this volume, which contains the writer's articles of faith, with much pungent humor addresses in turn: the "professionalized" contemporary artist, "woefully narrow," segregated in cliques, obsessed by technique ("sacrosanct word"), full of enmity toward rival artistic sects and of scornful chuckles at the benighted public; the professional, deep-sea critic, exaggerating minor issues, throwing dust in the eyes of the layman, and getting generally between beauty and her votaries; and that harried mortal, seeking to be fed, whose name is Legion, alias the "general reader," and who answers to the name of "layman" in the presence of a work of art. It throws a good deal of "bounce" right into the rubbish heap, and presents a natural and essentially social conception of art, "the work of human hands, and meant just in proportion as it is great art, for human nature's daily food." Then, having cleared the air, our bracing critic proceeds to exercise in it.

Whether we get any forrader or not, he observes, there is no greater happiness than that which is to be found in disinterested talk about the things of the mind. Such, indeed, is his. With him, we feel to the quick, the interest is in art itself. Fret and foolishness fall from us and we are concerned with the things that endure. And unless we are an immovable body we certainly do get "forrader." Charming critics there are who talk all around a picture without once touching it. Mr. Cortissov's function is to help us to see things as they are. He has a notion that the commonplace of biography are useful in checking swelling ardors. So had Fromentin, who very probably knew as much about technique as any man going. The colossal genius was also a man like ourselves. And across the ages it is meet to look at Leonardo: "Not an incredible Olympian, lifting masterpieces out of the vasty deep by the waving of a wand, but a very mortal old Italian, taking the day's work, with its practical duties and its petty vexations, in a simple, man-like mood." So Mr. Cortissov mixes art and humanity. He makes a pilgrimage to Montauban, "for those who revere the name of Ingres a shrine." He tells us quite humanly just how he longed to go, what the landscape around about looks like, and of the row he had in obtaining admission to the museum. And, with tender sympathy, he brings us close to Ingres, a master of line if there ever was one, not only as a painter but as a man. In his tale of long, peaceful hours in contemplation of beauty in the museums of Europe, his touch is tender and musing, warm with sensuous tones. In the presence of his cherished masters he breathes an air serene. Rembrandt and Velasquez and Hals pass before us, warm and great and living, but not infallible. We are not to believe the nonsense of all the acolytes. For as a monument of common sense one time said, "A fallible being will fall somewhere."

Our critic talks of the Little Masters of the Low Countries, of Chardin and Alfred Stevens, of contemporary European painting, secular types in Italian mural decoration, French military painting and Spanish art in Spain and elsewhere. He gives a full, though judicious appreciation of Sargent. "Fortunate is the generation that is privileged to be painted by him." There is a pertinent and captivating essay on Whistler; and the reputation of Rodin, and the achievements on which it is based, are dealt with in a spirit of impartiality, novel, we think, save in the instance of Mr. Brownell's study of some years ago. About the admitted genius of Rodin, Mr. Cortissov finds nothing "grand, gloomy and peculiar." As an example of critical observation of pith all compact, now is this?

He tried to himself Victor Hugo, listening to the voices of nature, and if we are to believe the nonsense of his acolytes the poet, as he portrayed him, is truly rapt by the murmurs of the sea, but, as a matter of fact, he shows us only an old gentleman looking absurd in the absence of his clothes.

And then Mr. Cortissov comes home again. He delights in the "miniature Prado" in New York, our Hispanic Museum, too little known. "Decidedly, the scarier after artistic inspiration will henceforth count the Hispanic Museum among the shrines of great painting." And he goes to what soon came to be known as the Armory show. Now we come to things which Mr. Cortissov cannot "see" at all. Post-Impressionism, dealt with in a separate paper, is to him an "illusion." "A gospel of stupid license and self-assertion," it is a "force which will end." To go deep into the metaphysics of the subject is to him like "going down into a cellar at midnight without a candle to look for a black cat that isn't there, as the metaphysician, according to the witty Lord Bowen, is so often wont to do." The cat, he maintains, is not there. "Post-Impressionism as a movement, as a ponderable theory, is like the cat, an illusion." In the matter of the recent exhibition under the auspices of the Association of American Painters and Sculptors Mr. Cortissov pays abundant respect to the management and to the larger, "fine and stirring," unsensational part of the historic show, sadly overlooked in the general hubbub. The "whirling dervishes" of the Cubists and Futurists, "seeking, like the fat boy in 'Pickwick,' to make our flesh creep," of course get him going. They are all "cheek," "smug complacency" or downright incompetence. The reason for this is not far to seek. These pictures are certainly ugly, whether or not wantonly so. Whatever the men who made them were trying to do, or thought they were trying to do, or pretended they were trying to do, they were not trying to do that which Mr. Cortissov conceives to be the true function of the artist, "which is to learn his trade and then produce beautiful pictures." And that, certainly, is a perfectly ponderable theory. Cubism and Futurism are affections about which doctors disagree. And the whole matter is one which will in the course of due time all come out in the wash. Mr. Cortissov expresses the warmest appreciation of the two highly important virtues which stiffen the backs of our own Independents, the virtues of energy and truth. But he presses two points which have troubled many of us before. "Fearful of drawing like Academicians, they draw like navvies." And New York life "is not confined to the East Side or to Bohemia."

A valuable and exceedingly interesting paper in this volume is the essay on "Some Leaders in American Architecture," which is the first comparative appreciation of four leaders in this field. The volume concludes with a study of J. Pierpont Morgan as a collector, in which role Mr. Morgan was something of a mystery to the world at large. It deals especially with the measure of enjoyment the great collector may have drawn from the universality of his artistic interests. The commentators who have been busy since Mr. Morgan's death, the writer thinks, have, in one important point, done him a little less than justice, "not so much through what they have said as through what they have, perhaps unconsciously, implied." The paper discusses the methods employed by Mr. Morgan, as a collector fully representative of his time, in the accumulation of works of art; and it touches the question: are there many works of art in Mr. Morgan's immense collection which are not quite what they pretend to be?

To return to the glad gospel of "art and common sense." There are, indeed, "some impenetrable mysteries about a great work of art."

The creative impulse, behind it, the skill of eye and hand indispensable to its making, its strange garment of style—what is doubly strange because it proclaims both the individuality of the artist and all the masterpieces of all the arts together in a common tie—what shall designate the origin of these things or dogmatize about the processes whereby genius makes them do its bidding? Genius itself cannot solve the riddle.

But, the same critic says, "I would as unqualifiedly assert that for purposes of right thinking about a great work of art there is no mystery whatever." How shall the layman ever hope to be initiated into the meaning of the solemnities of criticism? He has only need "to use a little common sense in order to realize when he is being rationally instructed and when he is having his leg pulled." He, if he is wise, will make himself acquainted with the artist's point of view and that of the critic, "quietly supposed in countless studios, and out of them, too, for that matter, to be antagonistic to the artist's." He will use them both impartially, to "fertilize his intelligence." Then, with the open-mindedness of a lover of beauty, and, above all, with common sense, he will look at a work of art in a natural human way. "Let prejudice and pedantry go hang."



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ROBERT C. HOLLIDAY

Beauty is all. And is not beauty what we are all driving at?

Such is this critic, sound in mind and limb, and guaranteed to stand no hitching. Does he somewhat fail to see the vision and hear the angel voices? Not often, we think, when the cat is there.

ROBERT C. HOLLIDAY.

FICTION

South Africa—Louis Joseph Vance, Realist.

A STAGE CAREER.

JOAN THURSDAY. A Novel by Louis Joseph Vance. Illustrations by Oscar Cesare. 12mo. Pp. 288. Boston: Little, Brown & Co.

Here is a good, honest work, better than any other Mr. Vance has yet done. Turned realist, he proves his right to make the new departure in a story that holds the attention from first to last. We have had many novels of stage life during the last few years, and much of what he has to tell has necessarily been dealt with before, but even here the approach and the viewpoint are new; what may be called the "professional" side of his story is described with a touch that indicates thorough familiarity, and at the same time is fully informing to the layman. Whether Joan Thursday's career will be a great one is a question for the future to decide when the book closes. Mr. Vance does never for a moment suggest that she is a genius, but he develops convincingly in her the instinct for the theatre. It may carry her far with those aids to advancement which she ends by unscrupulously inviting and accepting.

The author has the good sense of indicating that the case of Joan Thursday is an individual one. He does not generalize, he does not load upon the stage at large the responsibility for her adventures. The girl leaves home because she is tired of contributing her slender wages to the support of a father who is a race-track maniac. She begins at the bottom of the ladder, in the cheapest of variety houses, becomes "lead" in a successful vaudeville playlet, and thus progresses toward a Broadway "house." She has grown up, she has not been educated. Her character has not been formed, she has no principles, she is unmoral, she plays fast and loose with the men who come into her life without rhyme or reason, capable only of obeying the influence of the present moment. She is waste from the slums, and yet, drift as she may, her selfish ambition guides her to at least material progress. That her character is but vaguely analyzed is perhaps the best proof of the quality of Mr. Vance's realism. There are many men and women like Joan Thursday, whom neither home nor school has prepared for the battle

of life which they must begin so young, and in which they conquer by their own dim, flickering, false lights.

HAIR RAISING.

THE MAN BETWEEN. By Walter Archer Frost. Illustrations by Howard McCormick. 12mo. Pp. viii, 304. Doubleday, Page & Co.

"nGaka" struck us at first as a bit of bad proofreading. But live and learn! A nGaka is a very much more terrible thing than the worst proof-reading we ever saw. A nGaka is chuck full of every kind of jim-jam imaginable. He wears a mutsha of reeds and a shirt. He has a bag at his waist, another at his neck and a third and fourth on his shoulders. The bags he keeps devils in. Mental influence is his strong card. Secondary reception, the power to effect will through distance, mental messages, reincarnation proceedings, and all sorts of telepathic doings, these are what he is up to all the while. He writhes as a snake writhes, and he has long, emaciated fingers, which he uses as conductors for curses. Also he is chocolate color. Happily, he does not infect these parts. Down Durban way in South Africa is where he has his home. In time, he is a witch doctor, a Zulu beggar. There is an excellent account of him in this book, and what he can do when he takes it into his head. Six men seated in the Regent's Club he cursed so: "Death shall come fast to those who have earned the nGaka's curse. But you, umFundize, who have offended the least, shall be the last claimed. You will be the last to die," he repeated forebodingly, from the doorway, "of those now sitting within this room! Then he melted into the blackness of the night." That umFundize business did not catch us this trip. Such is simply what a nGaka calls a splendidly fit human animal of an American, so rich that Christian people gave him the title of the Human Mint. For the details subsequent upon this curse we cheerfully recommend this harrowing story, presented against a background of social life, love and business in South Africa. It is very well told and the people, for characters in a tale of this nature, are a very decent sort.

CENSOR PROOF.

THE TASTE OF APPLES. By Jennette Lee. Illustrations by F. Walter Taylor. 12mo. Pp. vi, 148. Dodd, Mead & Co.

It is a good idea sometimes, we think, for the reviewer to echo the spirit of his author. And the spirit of a writer is present in his style. Now, this is why we have written our review here in the following singular manner. . . . We are afraid . . . that the effect . . . is something like that which would result in a page written half in the telegraphic code . . . but for this no one (we hope) will blame us. . . . This is a story of a couple of homely apple-pie New Englanders in Europe. . . . And it wears its simple sentiment on its sleeve . . . so to say. Anthony Wickham . . . Maker and Mender of Shoes . . . as the sign over his shop in the village of Bolton read, was a character all compact of the milk of human kindness. Mother . . . his Yankee wife . . . is a type dear to the heart . . . in sentimental moments . . . of those who listen with deep feeling to popular ballads sung . . . in places of amusement . . . to the accompaniment of vividly colored pictures cast upon a screen. . . . When, in their declining years, their son John . . . out of the fruits of his college education, so hard won by them for him . . . sends them on a trip to Europe . . . they find the great world quite different to Bolton. Mother, with her black bag, her bonnet and her cotton gloves, makes a quaint figure in London, where she keeps house à la New England. . . . And goes in strong . . . though without necessity . . . for economy. How Anthony's heart beats here in simple sympathy with all mankind . . . how he picks up dissolute beggars from the street, takes them to his apartment, and performs the somewhat unusual charity of mending their disintegrated shoes . . . how by his appreciation of the excellent shoes of an English lord, whom he picks up likewise on the street, he wins this gentleman's friendship . . . how a traditional bookseller discovers his truly surprising likeness to James McNeil Whistler . . . and how John finds his wife. . . . All these things go to make up a story which by no possibility could any public librarian taboo. . . .

REPUTED RELATION OF WASHINGTON.

From Notes and Queries. When I was a boy at Hampton-on-Thames, in the 60's of last century, an old woman named Steadman, or Steadman, kept a little shop and infant school, something like the one described in "Great Expectations." My father always told me that she was a niece of George Washington, and that handsome offers had been made to her if she would go to the United States; but that she had refused, being by no means proud of Washington, whom she styled "a traitor." Can any correspondent inform me if this was really the case? It was, at any rate, believed by all residents there.

BOOKS AND AUTHORS

Current Talk of Things Past, Present and to Come—Lord North and the American Colonies—American Slang Once More—The Marlboroughs.

Lord North's share in the loss to England of the American Colonies is carefully traversed in a forthcoming monograph by Mr. Reginald Lucas, who has studied with arduous evidence for and against his hero. The book will be of peculiar interest to students of American history.

Kind Words for Slang.

The more or less contemptuous discussion in England of American slang was lately interrupted by an acknowledgment of the virtues of "slang-in-moderation." It is "The London Globe" which says:

In itself, slang can certainly not be said to be objectionable; it is the sauce piquante of language, and is only to be deprecated if it be used to excess, or if it be feeble or unimaginative. Unfortunately, most English slang of the present day is lacking in vitality, which is precisely what "United States English" is not.

There is another peculiarity of American slang worthy of notice. Much of it is not really slang at all, but consists of the use of German and other foreign words, sometimes with the meaning a little stretched, but usually with the significance of the original preserved. On this side of the Atlantic the practice may appear irritating, but it is certainly no worse than the wanton and unnecessary use of French words by the mid-Victorian novelists, a characteristic still retained by some of their most mediocre successors. And there is perhaps nothing in American slang equalling in atrocity the pseudo-French of "bon de plume." The Americans have more imagination than to fancy that the result of translating English words into French words is necessarily French.

Shakespeare's Freshet.

One decidedly fresh bit of information is offered by a recent visitor to Stratford-on-Avon. It is to the pleasing effect that the schoolboys of the town all possess a strong and natural dramatic instinct and that they can do a Shakespearean play such as "Henry

V" with remarkable power. This agreeable visitor adds that among all the inhabitants there is a genuine and deep appreciation of the poet and his works, and that the Mayor, Councillor Ballance, sets a fine example to the corporation and burgesses by reading a piece of Shakespeare every day. "What needs my Shakespeare for his honored bones?"

The Marlboroughs.

The unpublished letters and papers at Blenheim have been used by Mr. Stuart J. Reid in the preparation of his forthcoming "Life and Letters of Sarah Duchess of Marlborough." This fresh material, it is said, has enabled the biographer to present a view of the tart duchess and her duke much more favorable than that adopted by Swift or Macaulay. The present duke has written an introduction to the book.

A Novelist's Suggestion.

The ironical humor of Mr. Cutcliffe Hyne matches that of his own Captain Kettle. In the window of the largest shop in the village in which the novelist lives this notice was posted the other day:

May I suggest to the individual who stole my apples that it is inadvisable to eat the specimens that have been doled with strychnine for the birds?—C. J. Cutcliffe Hyne.

Mr. Bain's Indian Stories.

The American readers of Mr. F. W. Bain's stories may like to know that they are to be issued in particularly dainty form from the Riccardi Press. "A Digit of the Moon" and "The Descent of the Sun" will be brought out this autumn and the other volumes will follow next year.

BOOKS EVERYBODY IS READING

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